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ABSTRACT

In the past, the social science literature has ignored or played down the role of fathers in relation to childrearing in the United States. Until recently, the few studies which did consider the role of fathers in childrearing tended to focus on negatives, particularly studies of Black fathers. Much of this research deals with only a fraction of the Black father population and tends to ignore strengths in the Black Family unit. To investigate the hypothesis that the Black father plays an important and positive role in his family, Black fathers (N=136) completed a questionnaire designed to elicit specific information from them about their attitudes toward their children, spouses, parents, and other Black fathers. Results suggest that Black fathers were more positively involved with their children and spouses and with their role of fathering than most social science literature previously indicated. Future studies should focus on Black father-infant interaction, long-term effects of prepared childbirth on the child, attitudes and values of successful Black fathers, the impact of father involvement on child development, Black fathers and daughters, Black fathers and sons, programs for young Black fathers, and shared parenting among Black couples. (Author/PAS)

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A SURVEY OF THE PARENTING ATTITUDES OF YOUNG BLACK FATHERS

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A SURVEY OF THE PARENTING ATTITUDES OF YOUNG BLACK FATHERS

A review of the literature about parenting which has been traditionally available suggests that usually the research/ discussions concern mothering. Fathers are dealt with in a periphial manner, if at all. His task was to "bring home the bacon" -- providing financial support to his family. Limited time seems to be spent with children (or spouse?) and it is assumed that this was the "best" arrrangement for the typical American family. To date, fathers have yet to be adequately studied for fulfilling this "masculine" role, although Fine (1978) suggests this traditional model is on the decline.

Some parenting activities which are attempted in a family (mother?) context include: speech and language formation, concept formation, moral development, motor-sensory development, gender-role development, emotional development, social development, play development and personality development, to name a few. Many books, articles and workshops have dealt with these topics.

A closer look at this child development literature indicates they (the researchers) are primarily discussing the middle class Anglo family, usually focusing on mothers, with little attention given to Black families. The attention that is offered regarding the Black family is usually in the terms of perceived deficits.

Billingsley (1970) writes that the majority of Black families are headed by men, most of whom are married to their original

wives and are employed full time, but are unable to pull themselves from the confines of poverty. However, he contends, that social scientists ignore these facts and treat the Black family in one of four manners. First, social scientists tend to focus on the lowest income group among Blacks; second, social scientists ignore Black families totally; third, they tend to view the Black, poor family who is experiencing problems as the "causal nexus" for difficulties experienced in wider society; and fourth, social scientists tend to ignore the majority of stable Black families. A review of the literature tends to support Billingsley's thesis. For example, Parker et. al. (1965) in studying the "characteristics of Negro mothers in single-headed households" begins by stating:

> "The Negro family in American has frequently been characterized as matri-centered, often with the father absent or having only a peripheral spouse and parental role . . . . Statistical studies have clearly demonstrated the widespread and increasing incidence of female-headed Negro families . . . ." (p. 94).

Parker goes on to suggest that many problems such as delinquency, homosexuality and mental disorders, are attributed to a father-absent family environment, and he concludes indicating:

> ". . . mothers in the broken home situation have poorer psychological adjustment and lower goal-striving for themselves and for their children than mothers in the intact family situation." (p. 100).

Interestingly, Hertzog and Sudia (1973) do not find those anticipated problems in so-called father-absent homes. They report that any signficant negative findings as relates to delinquency, male homosexuality and low school achievement among

males in father absent homes has not been demonstrated. However, the "stereotype" remains.

Hess and Shipman (1965), in a widely quoted paper, found a "lack of cognitive meaning" between the mothers and child in "deprived" families. "Deprived" mothers do not attend to the "individual characteristics" of a given situation and respond appropriately, thus creating a child who responds to authority and status rather than rationale. Bee et. al. (1969) agrees with Hess and Shipman that the mother of the "deprived" child is the source of learning difficulties which the child later experiences in school. "Evidence of an impoverished language environment and ineffectual teaching strategies experienced by the lower-class child" (as provided by the mother) render the child inadequately prepared for school. For example, she/he is not "equipped with the language tools or learning sets required for a systematic approach to the analysis of problems." (p. 733). Bee arrived at her conclusions after observing and comparing the interactions between middle- class mothers with their children and lower-class mothers with their children in both a structured and an unstructured situation.

Pinkney (1969) writes that in 1965, 72% of all Black families were composed of both husband and wife. He then goes on to say "the economic and social conditions under which Black Americans have lived have led to a disorganized family life, . . . characterized by instability." (pp. 94-95). From his figures, he is discussing about one-fourth of all the Black families; however,

this one-fourth is presented as being typical.

Moynihan (1965) in his widely quoted paper, analyzing and comparing Blacks and whites primarily from 1960 census data on items such as illigitimacy, unemployment, father-absent homes, welfare dependency, etc., tended to find Blacks lacking and proceeded to conclude that the problems facing Blacks are due to family disorganization. Staples (1978) discusses the Moynihan Report as hypocritical, making the victim the criminal. Billingsley (1970), too, is critical of Moynihan, saying that the report perpetuates the racism, ignorance and arrogance of social science. Billingsley goes on to say that social science has both failed and mistreated Black families in its approach. The reasons for this failure are:

1. Few scholars are present to study the family as an institution.
2. Social science is white, it has not taken Blacks seriously, it generally limits its scope to race relations, and Blacks are viewed as objects of assimilation.
3. Black scholars have either been ignored or mistreated.
4. Social science relies on statistical techniques and speculations which may not be reliable.

In another source, Billingsley (1968) writes that the Black family might be studied as a social system, an ethnic sub-society, a family structure, and a family function and he defines several types of families (i.e., nuclear, extended, and augmented),

explaining their function in the Black community. It is emphasized that Black families are best understood from a historical perspective as they involve a highly complex system with highly differentiated sub-systems which differ in terms of education, geography, and economics. Billingsley concludes by indicating that the present social science hierarchy must be overthrown, that the family as a unit must be seriously studied, and that a Black perspective must be gained.

Guthrie (1970ed.) focuses on the strengths of the Black family while acknowledging the existence of a matriarchy in about one-fourth of the families. He makes the point that judging dominant culture "patriarchial" homes by the standards of the ghetto will find the dominant culture homes lacking. Perhaps it is reasonable that using any "outgroup" criteria to study "in-group" phenomenon would be lacking. It does appear that the Black family has not been well studied by social scientists, and the few studies which have taken place are poorly controlled and tend to emphasize "negatives." However, there also seems to be a trend of Black social scientists beginning to study and analyse the family much as Billingsley suggests. It is important not merely to study what Black families <u>do not do</u>, but what they <u>do do</u>.

It appears that the "outculture" social scientist who is interested in studying the Black family might take a lead from anthropology. In studying Black family structure in the Caribbean, several anthropologists found a large percentage of female-headed households (R. Smith 1956; Kreisselman 1958;

M. B. Smith 1962; Cumper 1958; Salien 1959; Otterheim 1963; and Clarke 1957), the percentage range from 17% in British Guiana to 59% in Carriacori. Some researchers concluded that these people were immoral, promiscuous and possessed a loose, disorganized family life. However, upon closer scrutiny it was determined that certain economic-demographic factors characterized the Caribbean family system. These factors included the opportunity to earn and save money and male-female sex ratio. More specifically, many men prior to 25 years of age, joined a migratory wage labor force where they left their villages to work until they had saved enough money to purchase a house. For marriage to take place it was important that the man owned a home. Because many of the younger men left their villages to work, the male-female sex ratio remaining in the village was unbalanced. Since some of the younger men never returned to the village the sex ratio is permanently imbalanced; thus, some women would not be able to find spouses. The women seem to adapt to these situations by either leaving the village to seek work, or by seeking married male members of the village with whom to have on-going "relationships." The married men help these women to set up and to maintain a household and the behavior is acceptable by the villagers. Clarke's data (1957) indicates that the greater the economic well-being of an area, the greater the percentage of marriage and the lower the percentage of consensual unions. It thus appears that the Black family in the Caribbean has adapted to the economic and family demands characterizing life there.

While I am not suggesting that Black families in the United States are exactly alike those in Caribbean, I am suggesting that perhaps social scientists can and should learn from the above example. For survival purposes, a reasonable assumption is that the Black family in the United States, regardless of its socio-economic status, has also adapted to its situation (i.e., discrimination, segregation, prejudice, poor economic and educational opportunities, etc.), but it has not been adequately researched or studied. Certainly this adaptation can be perceived as a strength.

A specific area of investigation regarding the Black family is that of the role of the father. As discussed above, a survey of the literature regarding Black families deals with family disorganization, the (myth of) the matriarchy, the unstable family, juvenile delinquency, illegitimacy, low aspiration, sensory deprivation (or over-stimulation), unemployment or under-employment, educational handicaps, etc. Other topics include alcohol and drug abuse, genetic inferiority, and low self esteem -- in short, pathology. Seemingly nothing positive happens within the Black family, or with the Black father. The few studies which do include Black fathers compare him with white fathers, picture him as absent, aggressive, involved with crime, uninvolved and chauvenistic as relates to mate and child (Hetherington 1975; Lynn 1974; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; David and Brannon 1976; Green 1976; Rapaport 1980). Little or no data is presented to support these theories, the studies are poorly designed or controlled, and

questions are raised as relates to interpretation of the findings (Billingsley's arguments are appropos). Another book which includes some Black authors and discusses important topics regarding men and male problems deals with Black men from a "humorous reflection." Petras (1975). It seems reasonable that since the Black family has survived (and progressed?) under suppression, ridicule, prejudice and discrimination indicates a strength -- a strength of togetherness, of unity, of caring, of involvement, of continuing under extreme conditions, and of adapting. It is this strength to which this paper addresses itself.

According to Pinkney and Billingsley, the nuclear Black family is headed by a man and woman, married (the original marriage for both) with their off-spring residing with them. Somehow this fact does not get translated in much of the social literature. Diggs findings (1973) also support this contention.

Seemingly, the Black father plays a very important and positive role in his family; however, the specific role the Black father plays is not discussed.

The purpose of this research was to gather some empirical data about the Black father -- with emphasis on the young Fathers. We are specifically concerned with the following areas:

1. How does he view his role as father.
2. How does he perceive the Black male's role as mate.
3. How does he perceive the Black male's role as father.
4. Are there male-female child-rearing differences.

It is hypothesized that Black men will see themselves and

other black men as involved, adequate fathers and mates; that they believe in treating their children equally; and that they share childrearing responsibilities with their mates.

METHOD

Subjects. The Black males included in this sample were found in a variety of settings. In fact, the only place E's were told not to question Black men was on any college or university campus.

"The man on the street" was the person from whom we wanted to gather information. Settings where the men were questioned included: barber shops, churches, work sites, shopping centers, parks, departments of public social service offices waiting rooms, and "on the street." Permission to interview was always obtained and background data was gathered first.

Questionnaire. A two-page self-report questionnaire was developed designed to elicit specific information from Black fathers as relates to their attitudes towards their children, their mates, their parents and other Black fathers. Background demographic information was also gathered.

Sixteen students (E's) in a junior level psychology course the author was teaching were trained to administer the questionnaire. Eight male and eight female students were selected. Each E was given thirty (30) questionnaires and told to complete them themselves.

Training consisted of making the E familiar with the

questionnaire, practicing recording while another was talking and learning how to approach a perspective subject. The E introduced themself to S, read the introductory statement, and requested their permission to participate. Then E read the questions and wrote down the responses verbatim. Each "session" lasted between 18-45 minutes, depending on the length of response, how quickly the S responded and how fast the E was able to write. Those questionnaires which were not completely answered were omitted from the data analysis. One hundred thirty six (136) completed questionnaires are included in the results.

RESULTS

A. Demography (See Table I):

1. Most of the males sampled were between 20 and 39 (86%).
2. The vast majority of those sampled were married (77%) and have been married between one and ten years (71%).
3. About 2/3's of the sample have one or two children (66%); 84% were reared in an urban area; most (81%) came from larger families than they now have (at least three siblings).
4. 3/4 are Baptist; 89% are Laborers (most semi-skilled or skilled); a large number have a high school (33%) or better education (59%), about 2/3 have spouses who work, and a majority (61%) have an income less than $12,000. Educationally, the sampled population has progressed

TABLE I.

The demographic data as summarized in percentages.

A. Age:	20-29	42%	B. Marital Status:	Married	77%	C. Years Married:	1-5	39%		
	30-39	44%		Divorced/ Separated	19%		6-10	32%		
				Never Married	4%		11-15	20%		
							16 more	8%		

D. Number of Children	1	31%	E. Number of Siblings (as Child)	1-5	73%
	2	35%		6-9	27%
	3	19%			
	4	10%			
	5	3%			
	6 or more	2%			

				1	8		
				2	11		
				3	17		
				4	26		
				5	15		
				6 or more	27		

F. Area Reared			G. Religion		
Rural	16%		Baptist	72%	
Urban	84%		Other	28%	

H. Education (theirs)		Their Fathers	I. Occupation Theirs		J. Income	
Less than High School	8%	59%	Skilled laborer	72%	Under 6000	12%
High School Grad	33%	28%	Unskilled laborer	17%	6-9000	22%
1-3 yrs. College	33%	4%	Professional	11%	9-12000	27%
4 yrs. College	12%	3%			12000 up	39%
Graduate/Professional School	14%	6%				

K. Wife Who Works		Mother who worked
Yes	62%	59%
No	34%	41%
Not Married	4%	

beyond their fathers as 87% of their dads had a high school or less education. A majority had mothers who worked (59%).

B. Responses to Questions (See Table II):

1. About 42% though a woman's place was at home, 21% thought she should be working and 37% thought it should be her choice.
2. 2/3 shared disciplining of children -- usually using corporal punishment. Over half of the males felt the father was the "Boss" at home while 38% indicated a sharing attitude. Their mothers had been their primary discipliner, also using corporal punishment.
3. The men felt that education and obtaining the "good life" were the major goals for their children (82%) and they thought their mates shared these goals (84%).
4. Regarding their own roles, Black males suggest positive influence for both their mates (66%) and their children (74%) wanting to offer guidance, leadership, support and understanding. However, when asked about other Black fathers' needs as relates to their relationship with their mate, a surprising 63% said yes there is a need for change or were undecided. Usually, they suggested a need to "get along better." A large number (66%) also were undecided or reported a need to change the Black father role with Black children. They felt Black men should spend more time with their children, listen more, or offer more guidance.

II. TABLE II.

Responses to Questions expressed in Percentages.

A. A Woman's Place is:

at home	42%
working	21%
her choice	37%

B. Who Disciplines Your Children? Who disciplined you as a child?

Father	23%	24%
Mother	12%	45%
Both	65%	31%

C. Means of Discipline You Use Means Your Adults Used (On You)

Physical	15%	54%
Verbal	20%	11%
Withhold Reinforcement	31%	12%
Physical & Verbal	34%	23%

D. Your Goals for Your Children Mate's Goals for Children

Education	36%	44%
Good Life	46%	40%
Children set own goals	14%	13%
Stay out of trouble	4%	3%

E. Who is "Boss" in your household?

Father	57%
Mother	5%
Share	38%

F. In General, how do you characterize your roles as relates to your mate.

Mutual Understanding/Support	59%
Guidance/Leadership	7%
Poor Interaction	25%
Same as Whites	9%

G. Do other Black men need to change their relationship with their mate.

Yes	62%
No	37%
Undecided	1%

II. TABLE II (Cont'd)

Responses to Questions expressed in Percentages.

G. (Cont'd)

If yes, how should he change? (Most Frequent Responses)

Offer more understanding
Improve communication
Show more respect

H. In general, how do you characterize your roles as relates to your children?

Mutual Understanding/Support	41%
Love/Leadership	33%
Poor Interaction	16%
Same as Whites	10%

I. Do other Black men need to change their relationship with their children?

Yes	64%
No	34%
Undecided	2%

If yes, how should he change? (Most Frequent Responses)

Spend more time with them
Offer more guidance
Listen to them more

J. How do you spend your leisure time with your children?

Recreation	74%
Education	15%
Discipline	1%
"Everything"	4%
No leisure time	6%

Do your children have a "say" in these activities?

Yes	94%
No	6%

K. Regarding Black children, should males be treated differently from females?

Yes	52%
No	46%
Undecided	2%

II. TABLE II (Cont'd)

Responses to Questions expressed in Percentages.

K. (Cont'd)

If yes, in what ways should they be treated differently?

Teach males greater responsibility
Teach respect for Black women
Teach identity and freedom to males
Teach male dominance
Treat males rougher
Show boys more love than shown in the past

5. Most fathers reported spending positive leisure time with their children (93%) with the vast majority (94%) allowing the child to have a say in these activities.
6. Finally, Black fathers tended to believe that male and female children should be treated the same. Those who felt that children should be treated differently based on gender, were more harsh, rough and physical with males -- apparently wanting to teach them dominance or to prepare them for dealing with a cruel, harsh, racist world outside. A few felt that males should be shown more love and should be trained to be more respectful of women.

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this research was to attempt to get a feeling as to how Black males who are fathers feel about themselves as fathers, as mates, and how they feel about other Black fathers. A review of the literature indicated an absence of meaningfully relevant empirical data about Black men who are fathers. Therefore, a two page questionnaire was developed to sample the expressed attitudes of this population. The sample came from a Southern California urban area.

It was hypothesized that Black men would report they were actively involved with their children and with their mates, that they perceived other Blacks men as also being so involved, and that they treated their children equally. The hypothesis were all

supported, except the Black men tended to perceive other Black men lacking as relates to both children and mate. They tended to report that Black men should learn to get along better with their families. One possible explanation for this "I'm okay, you're not" attitude is that perhaps Black men have bought into the stereotype which social scientists in the past have put forth. This is most alarming and social scientists must begin to exercise reasonable caution in the perpetuation of such a negative (and inaccurate? viewpoint). It is also important that Black men begin to understand and to question such notions.

As relates to Black women, in no way is the present study intended to be negative towards Black mothers. Being pro father is not anti mother. Certainly social scientists have and continue to treat Black females from a "deficit" perspective to the point that the serious scholar must wonder what, if anything, is known about her. Recent books are beginning to attest to her strength, love and commitment (Lerner, 1973), but much damage has already been done. The Black men in this study seem to be cognizant of her positive impact on them and their children. This researcher believes that men can and should be involved in all possible areas of child development/child rearing.

There are several limitations in this study. First, the problems with any self report methodology, including problems of validity and reliability, are obvious. However, this study represents but a beginning (hopefully) of additional research which can use more elaborate procedures. Further, it is recognized that caution must be exercised in generalizing the

findings -- Southern California does not represent the nation. The sampled population tended to be young, educated beyond high school, stable and intact, with small families (one or two children). It certainly is possible that these findings are indicative of the attitudes and behaviors of Black fathers from similar backgrounds across the nation. However, additional data is needed from this population prior to drawing any such conclusion.

Secondly, the author's perceptions represent a limitation. It is felt that as much (or more?) can be gleaned from research which focuses on positives as that which focuses on negatives. At some point social scientists might seriously attempt to focus on successful persons (fathers, mothers, readers, children, happy persons, etc.) to determine how and why they're doing what they're doing. Perhaps information might be gleaned which can be used to help others become happy, satisfied, successful, etc. Thus, while an attempt is made to be objective and the data is represented as it was gathered, no effect was made to focus on perceived deficits which are often presented in the literature. That is, the researcher was not interested in asking negative questions, or questions which reinforced negative stereotypes, or interpreting the findings in a negative manner (e.g., absenteeism, marginality, matriarchies, etc.). There are serious flaws in those studies which do focus on stereotypes and ethical concerns are raised about those who seem to have the need to perpetuate those negative images. This in no way implies that there may be <u>some</u> validity to <u>some</u> of these negative notions. However, one must begin to

question these notions when they are presented as the norm in the face of obvious contradictions.

Thirdly, much of the literature reviewed is dated. However, it is the research which is available. There is a need for further research of this nature. Ideally, this research should take direction from inculture researchers. Possible areas of scientific endeavor include: Longitudinal studies about Black father-infant interaction; the long term effects of prepared child birth on the child, the mother and the father; attitudes and values of those Blacks who are successful fathers; impact of father involvement on child development (moral, social, intellectual, etc.); Black fathers and daughters; Black fathers and sons; Programs for young Black fathers; and shared parenting among Black couples. The current study might be strengthened if Black females were asked similar questions about Black fathers to determine the degree of correlation with the fathers' responses.

Summarizing, this data suggests that Black men are involved with their children and their mates in a meaningful manner and they seem to want to be; they see themselves in a positive way; and, they tend to share child rearing responsibilities. In short, they tend to be democratic at home. As Diggs suggested years ago, Black families have been both intact and democratic traditionally but were usually ignored or misrepresented. The time is ripe for us to begin to study what Blacks are doing rather than what is assumed we aren't doing, to limit meaningless comparisons with vague, superficial, biased criteria, and to question the motives of those who focus on deficits, reinforce stereotypes, or

perpetuate the negative orientations as relates to minorities in the United States.

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